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Praise More, Spank Less . . .

By Alma H. Jones

(Extension Specialist in Child Development)

DURING the past few years many changes have come about in ideas regarding child rearing. For example, Dr. Walter Ramsay, Director of The Children's Hospital, St. Paul, Minnesota, said in a recent article, "Only a few years ago, doctors as well as people generally thought that babies up to one year should be fed exclusively on milk, and that if they accidentally got hold of and ate an uncooked vegetable or fruit during their first two years they would probably be sick."

"Now we have changed our ideas radically and feed children extra food, almost from the time they are born. We now advise mothers to give diluted, uncooked fruit juice to their babies soon after they are born, and raw scraped fruits and vegetables by one year."

Cereal, cooked vegetables, egg yolk and scraped meat are commonly added in a gradual scheme of supplementing the diet at from 3 to 6 months. In special cases, as for example, with the premature baby who needs special amounts of iron and the growth vitamin, egg yolk is frequently added by 1 month. Instead, of the fear that the baby's orange juice, if taken near the time for milk feeding, will curdle the milk and make him sick, physicians are now successfully prescribing lemon or orange juice, or measured amounts of lactic acid to help the young-baby to digest his milk more easily.

Likewise, some changes have come about in methods of guiding the conduct of children.

Time worn ideas such as those regarding "lickin and learnin'", and "breaking the child's will," have gone into discard along with pacifiers, soothing syrups and teething bands.

NEW ideas have supplanted some of the old notions regarding praise, and its use in child guidance. In the past, the idea prevailed that giving a child praise is an evidence of conceit on the part of the parent. And that praise is unwise because it invariably makes children vain. Therefore, praise was a dangerous tool that should be used infrequently, if at all.

Let us analyze several stories from mothers concerning praise. They came to my attention through the Wallace's Farmer contest of about a year ago, on "What's the Matter With Willie?" These stories of mothers may help us to understand how praise may be used as an aid to the child in growth in wholesome habits and personality traits.

"Edgar, having been the best baby I ever saw had the misfortune to swallow

some kerosene when he was 3 years old, which caused a severe illness.

"When he recovered he was the most stubborn child I think I ever saw. Thinking he was spoiled while sick I spanked him a number of times. Seeing that this method got me nowhere, I set about to discover another way to bring him back to his own good self.

"Nothing I did pleased him. I finally decided to leave him absolutely alone unless he accidentally did something I wanted him to do. Then I praised him to Daddy and big brother. I tried to



Praise Is Encouraging

avoid telling him to do things, but when he did things unasked, Oh My! What a fine little man he was! It was a long time before I could see much difference.

"In the meantime, he was well nourished, and at six he went to school and got a six point health star, and learned to play the harp. We praised him for these things. It has been a long hard fight, but now he tries to please the teacher as well as his parents. He does lots of work morning and evening and gets his lessons at night of his own accord, and has many friends in and out of school.

"So, I believe that praise properly applied can do more good than nagging and spanking."

With the habit of stubbornness developing, many earnest parents would see the necessity for strenuous measures to break up such an undesirable tendency at once. This mother resorted to the "sound spanking" only to find that it didn't work. The stubbornness, no doubt,

was due to physical as well as emotional causes.

It is quite likely that general lassitude and debility following illness, was a cause of stubbornness. Because of this the child tended to withdraw rather than welcome various forms of activity and therefore he disregarded his parents' wishes. Emotionally, the child desired the attention to continue which was showered upon him in illness by solicitous parents. Refusals were one way of securing attention.

The mother was wise in building up his health through a wise food and health routine. Also, she was wise in helping him to find interesting things to do. The parents followed the policy of "watchful waiting" in looking for opportunities for praising the boy for effort put forth along desirable lines, meanwhile overlooking his desire to be the center of attention by refusal to act in desired ways. Edgar, though only two, in time understood that refusals didn't get him what he wanted, but that cooperation gained for him the attention he desired.

YOU will notice that his mother said "It was a long hard fight, but now he tries to please the teacher as well as his parents and has many friends both in and out of school." Though time and patience were necessary it appears that the longest way around was the shortest way home. Through praise, the child was helped in finding his own responsibility.

Rule 1 is this: Commendation or praise for worthy effort should be recognized as a strong whip to promote good conduct.

Another story, related in the same series of letters will show how parents endeavored to make praise a help instead of a handicap to their child.

"My little girl at six was getting conceited. Her mother liked to make pretty clothes and her doting grandpa was always telling her how fine she looked. Something had to be done.

"Whenever she began admiring herself in a new dress, I would say, 'yes, it is very pretty. And did you notice the pretty dress that cousin Betty wore at Sunday School? I liked that so much, too.' Or, if it were a hat, I would say, 'Yes, and did you see Grace's hat, about the color of yours. You both look nice in blue.'

"She got over the superiority feeling without losing her pleasure in new clothes."

This story shows that in the beginning the child was praised unwisely. How "fine" she looked was not dependent on any effort or self-sacrifice on the child's part, therefore, she was not deserving of praise, except possibly as evidence of efforts in personal care. Her vanity was growing to the point where she would be saying like the little boy

with a new suit, "Gee, I wish I could stand on the corner and watch myself go by."

How she looked and not what she did was becoming important. The child apparently was beginning to make an obvious bid for praise, and, possibly, would soon learn to enjoy praise so much that she might easily belittle the achievements of others in order to exalt herself. Her parents, sensing this problem through their suggestions, endeavored to help her to show enthusiasm for the successes and achievements of her friends. Thus, a basic principle of likeableness and good sportsmanship was being instilled.

Here is rule 2: The child must earn praise through effort or self-sacrifice. He must learn to enjoy praising others who deserve it, and to show enthusiasm for the successes of others.

DR. FELIX ADLER says "We should correct faults in such a way as to imply that not everything is lost, and praise merit in such a way as to imply that not everything has been achieved." Thus, in correcting a fault such as telling a falsehood, he would express confidence in the transgressor's desire and ability to do right. For example, "You

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*The farmer said to a tiny oak,
"Obey me—be a radish!
Inedible roots are just a joke,
And too much height is baddish!"
He pruned it and clipped it almost
bare,
And, when its growth was through,
He had only an oak tree there,
And a very poor one, too.*

Wasn't this a foolish farmer?

*The poultryman said to a tiny chick,
"Grow up and be a cow!
It's easy; grass won't make you sick,
Learn to give milk somehow!"
He fed it cowfeed and watched for
hair,
But when its growth was done,
He had only a rooster there,
And a very sickly one.*

Wasn't this a peculiar poultryman?

*The father said to a tiny child,
"Grow up as I want you to be;
Whatever you want is wicked and wild;
You've got to be shaped by me."
He fed it nauseous Don'ts and Do's,
And when its growth was done,
He had, in spite of his vigorous views,
A sullen, singleton son.*

Wasn't this an intelligent parent?

—Clement Wood, in Parent's Magazine.

have told a falsehood, but surely you will not do so again; hereafter, I am relying on you to tell the truth."

And this brings us to rule 3: Every child should be given opportunity to earn praise in matters requiring care and effort.

In this connection it may be said that parents or teachers should see that the able and less able, physically and mentally have an equal opportunity to receive praise for honest effort in order that each one will be stimulated to do his best work. Someone has said that praise is to the child's soul what sunshine is to his body.

As a child, I recall that my mother used to change the potted flowers about on the old-fashioned flower stand in the bay window, putting the ones that had been in the background to the front where there was more sunshine. Thus, all plants were given an equal chance

for sturdy growth. Does it occur to us as parents or teachers that the smaller or the less able child needs a change for the limelight through celebration of his successes, even more than the older and abler child?

FOR example—a girl of twelve years was rather slow in her studies. Her teacher called attention to her failure, causing her to become shy and to feel inferior to others. She was unable to do her best and to recite creditably.

A new teacher came upon the scene. This teacher was more kind and more discerning than the former teacher. She watched for an opportunity to give the girl recognition for worthy effort. One day, the garment on which she was working in her sewing class showed up well in comparison with others in the group. She called attention to her good workmanship with a little extra enthusiasm because of the special need for re-established confidence in the girl. The effect on the girl's efforts and accomplishments was very salutary, both in her hand work and in the studies in which she had been failing.

It is very important in dealing with the physically handicapped children to help them to find that they have abilities that tend to serve as a compensation for their handicaps. The boy who cannot make a home-run on the base-ball diamond because of a stiff knee will surely have recognition as a "swift runner" when it comes to mathematical problems, or other activities in which he excels.

Miss Lillian Gilbreth, mother and industrial efficiency engineer, says that every child in the home should have a chance to lead as well as to follow. As parents, we need to be careful that the abler child does not receive all the sunlight, for he, meanwhile, like the plant in the sunshine, will grow larger and sturdier throwing the other children more and more into the shadow and depriving them of a chance for development.

NOW for rule 4: Smaller and less able children, physically, mentally and emotionally, will share alike with older and abler children in opportunities to earn deserved recognition.

I have tried to show that praise may be an aid to children in finding zest in good workmanship, joy in responsibility and a desire for self-respect through performance of duty. It is an aid in teaching the inexperienced child the difference between right and wrong, thus giving encouragement to right conduct. Failing in these requirements it is an indication that praise or commendation has been wrongly used.

Rather than the fear, as of old, that praise or recognition will invariably make the child vain, or that it is an expression of conceit on the parent's part, I have tried to point out its value in stimulating growth along wholesome lines.

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